National African Immigrant and Refugee HIV/AIDS & Hepatitis Awareness Day 2023

#NAIRHHADAY is now an officially recognized HIV awareness day. Join a September 14 webinar to learn why this matters.

September 12, 2023 By Trent Straube

It's official! National African Immigrant and Refugee HIV/AIDS & Hepatitis Awareness (NAIRHHA) Day has been recognized by the federal government. Advocates began promoting the awareness day in 2014 via citywide events in Boston, and now thanks to the Department of Health and Human Services their efforts can help raise awareness of HIV and hepatitis among African immigrants and refugees nationwide each September 9.

NAIRHHA Day is led by the Hepatitis B Foundation, the Africans For Improved Access program at the Multicultural AIDS Coalition and the Coalition Against Hepatitis for People of African Origin.

> It is OFFICIAL! Join us as we celebrate this milestone.
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> pic.twitter.com/q2YJraMSY3
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> — NAIRHHA Day (@NAIRHHADay) August 31, 2023

According to an NAIRHHADay.org fact sheet, HIV and hepatitis B among African immigrants in the United States is a "hidden epidemic." In fact:

- 40% to 70% of people living in the United States with hep B are foreign born, and African immigrants face the highest average chronic hepatitis B rates in the United States, and

- HIV diagnosis rates among African-born people in the United States are six times higher than

those of the general population.

Although September 9 was Saturday, NAIRHHA is being observed throughout the entire month of September. For example, you can join a Thursday, September 14, webinar discussion at 6 p.m. ET titled “Official Recognition of NAIRHHA Day: What It Means & Why It Matters.” Click here to register.

Organizers of the webinar describe the event as follows:

> National African Immigrant and Refugee HIV & Hepatitis Awareness (NAIRHHA) Day is now an officially recognized awareness day by the Department of Health and Human Services and will be listed on HIV.gov this September. The House of Representatives is also passing a resolution to designate September 9th (NAIRHHA Day) as a federal health observance. Join us for a discussion about the significance of this recognition. We will hear a variety of perspectives, from elected officials who advocated for formal recognition of the day, to public health practitioners working on immigrant health, to individuals with lived experience, who will share what the day means for them and why this long-awaited designation is so important. We hope you can join us!

Speakers include Amanda Lugg, the executive director of African Services Committee in New York City and a cofounder of NAIRHHA Day; Teresia, an HIV storyteller; and Jean-Jacques Kayembe, the project/program manager for the Hepatitis B Prevention Program at the Communicable Disease Epidemiology & Immunization Section of the King County Department of Health in Seattle and the founder and executive director of the Congolese Health Board.

Visit NAIRHHADAY.org for more information, including fact sheets, resources and downloadable, sharable graphics in English, Kinyarwanda, Swahili, Somali, Amharic and French. Further information is available on HIV.gov. You can also visit NAIRHHADay on Facebook and follow @NIRHHADay on X (formerly Twitter).

The awareness day takes place in September, explains NAIRHHADAY.org, because the month had already been designated as National African Immigrant Heritage Month to celebrate the diverse and remarkable contributions—in spheres ranging from sports to writing to politics—through which African immigrants have enriched the United States.

Advocates say they “aim to bring both national and local attention to the highly prevalent health issues of HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis in the African immigrant and refugee population in the United States, in a way that is culturally and linguistically appropriate. NAIRHHA Day provides a way for organizations, communities, families and individuals to:

- Raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and viral hepatitis to eliminate stigma;

- Learn about ways to protect against HIV, viral hepatitis and other related diseases;
- Take control by encouraging screenings and treatment, including viral hepatitis vaccination;
- Advocate for policies and practices that promote healthy African immigrant communities, families and individuals."

????On National African Immigrants and Refugee HIV/AIDS and Hepatitis Awareness Day (#NAIRHHADay), we're dedicated to empowering communities to prioritize their health through screenings, treatment, and vaccination against HIV/AIDS and hepatitis B, aiming to end global stigma. pic.twitter.com/HnHsXdjofw

— ViiV Healthcare US (@ViiVUS) September 9, 2023

Hepatitis refers to inflammation of the liver. When untreated, it can lead to scarring of the liver (cirrhosis), liver cancer, the need for a liver transplant and death. Hepatitis can be caused by several factors, including toxins, excess alcohol use, autoimmune diseases, fat in the liver and viruses, including the three most common ones: hepatitis A, B and C.

Be a part of the solution and #getinvolved! @NAIRHHADay promotes and encourages African-born individuals to receive screenings & treatment, including viral Hep vaccination. #NAIRHHAD

pic.twitter.com/zHUVwaKRGX

— NCAAN (@NCAIDSAction) September 9, 2020

HIV, in contrast, is a virus that attacks the immune system. Over several years, the immune system becomes depleted, and the body isn't able to fight infections, leading to an AIDS diagnosis. Although there is no cure for HIV, many safe and effective treatments—often just one pill a day—are available. The medications help people living with HIV enjoy long and healthy lives and keep them from transmitting the virus to others. For more, see the Basics of HIV/AIDS in POZ.com, a sister publication of HepMag.com, RealHealthMag.com, CancerHealth.com and TuSaludMag.com.

As the Hepatitis B Basics in Hep Mag explains:

> Hepatitis B virus (HBV) is a highly contagious viral infection that can cause liver damage. The virus is easily spread via hep B–positive blood, semen or other body fluids. Pregnant women who have hepatitis B can also transmit the virus to their babies, usually during birth. People who have not been infected with HBV can be vaccinated against the virus to prevent infection....
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> Because of routine HBV vaccination, the number of new hepatitis B infections in the United States has declined from about 260,000 a year in the 1980s to nearly 21,000 in 2016, with the greatest decline occurring in children and adolescents.
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> Worldwide, more than 2 billion people have been infected with hepatitis B at some point, resulting in 257 million people with chronic infections. Globally, roughly 887,000 people die of HBV-related liver disease each year. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, an estimated 850,000 people in the United States have chronic HBV infection. Some experts believe there are up to 2.2 million people with hepatitis B in the United States. The most recent data show nearly 1,900 people died of hepatitis B–related causes.

To learn more about other HIV awareness days, including a calendar you can download and print, visit "2023 HIV/AIDS Awareness Days."

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